

## House passes nonbinding resolution on Iraq

Edward Epstein, Chronicle Washington Bureau

Friday, February 16, 2007



**(02-16) 12:25 PST Washington** -- The House sent President Bush a double-barreled confrontational message today, telling him it opposes his latest buildup of troops in Iraq and in the next few weeks will try to start curtailing military operations in the war zone.

The Democratic-led House approved 246 to 182 a nonbinding resolution expressing the support of Congress for the U.S. troops serving in Iraq while opposing Bush's plan to send 21,500 more combat troops into the war.

Seventeen Republicans joined 229 Democrats in voting for the resolution. Two Democrats and 180 Republicans voted against it.

Before the House voted after 45 hours of debate that began Tuesday, lawmakers heard Speaker Nancy Pelosi reiterate her position that the 97-word resolution is just the start of the Democratic effort to end the four-year-old war.

"The passage of this legislation will signal a change in direction in Iraq that will end the fighting and bring our troops home," Pelosi said in the debate's final hours before a chamber half-full of Democrats who had been summoned to hear their new speaker. The Republican side was all but empty as she spoke.

Next up for the House will be legislation being pushed by one of Pelosi's closest allies, Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., that will seek to limit Bush's ability to deploy more troops to Iraq. Murtha, the chairman of the panel overseeing military spending, plans to attach his proposals as conditions next month to Bush's latest \$100 billion war spending request. Murtha said he will require that no units be sent to Iraq until fully trained and equipped, including the latest armored protection against roadside bombs.

Murtha also plans, with Pelosi's full support, to require military units receive more time at home before they can be redeployed to Iraq and to end the practice of "stop loss" in which military personnel are kept on active duty past their date for leaving the service.

Today's House passage of the resolution spurred Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., to try to break the partisan deadlock over the war in the upper chamber.

Republicans earlier blocked a vote on a more wide-ranging bipartisan resolution against Bush's plan that had been sponsored by Sen. John Warner, R-Va., a former Navy secretary and past chairman of the Armed Services Committee.



Reid plans a rare Saturday vote -- when the body should have begun its weeklong Presidents' Day recess -- on a motion to proceed with debate on the House-approved statement.

But the minority leader, Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., told reporters Friday that he remains confident he can muster enough Republicans to block Reid's latest effort, which would need 60 votes to pass. Democrats hold a 51-49 majority in the Senate.

McConnell appeared with the House Minority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, to demand votes in both chambers on proposals that Congress not cut funding for the war while U.S. forces are in the field.

Bush has said that while he disagrees with Pelosi and Murtha and their supporters he respects their right to make their case opposing his latest troop increase.

Bush's spokesman, Tony Snow, said Murtha's proposals to require better training and equipment as well as longer times between deployments were dangerous.

"Anything that is going to tie the hands of military commanders and deny both the funds and flexibility they're going to need, he will take a dim view of," Snow said of the president.

"We're just not going to get into trying to characterize a specific position about a bill that has yet to see the light of day," Snow added.

Bush spoke with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki on Friday and encouraged him to have his forces take a more active role in fighting insurgents. The president said he conveyed "a message of urgency to the Iraqi government that our patience is not unlimited and that we expect that government to perform."

The final hours of the House debate -- in which 392 members spoke -- were pointed as both sides repeated the themes that have sounded since Tuesday.

Republicans opponents said the resolution was contradictory in praising the troops but opposing their mission. They also said it amounted to micromanaging military strategy.

"Are we really best equipped to decide what reinforcements are sent into battle?" asked Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore. "Isn't that better left to the commanders in the field?"

Rep. Mike Ferguson, R-N.J., acknowledged that Bush's strategy hasn't worked too well, but said the Democrats, by opposing Bush's "surge," were in effect endorsing the status quo.

"The prospect of success are dwindling but a new and amplified effort may offer the best hope we have for success and for the Iraqi government," Ferguson said.

And Republicans warned that the Iraq war is part of the broader fight against Islamic extremism.

"What we're doing with this resolution is not a salute to GI Joe. It's a salute to jihadist Joe," said Rep. Phil Gingrey, R-Ga.

But Democrats said it's time for a sharp change of course with Iraq stuck in a civil war as the American military operation soon enters its fifth year with more than 3,100 Americans killed and more than \$400

billion spent.

"Sending 21,000 more troops is nothing but stay the course on steroids," said Rep. Xavier Becerra, D-Los Angeles

Rep. Paul Hodes, D-N.H., one of the Democratic freshman who ousted a GOP incumbent last November on an anti-war platform, said Congress must rein in the president. "The administration is in a parallel universe of its own creation," Hodes said.

While the resolution doesn't require Bush to do anything, its proponents hope it sends him a strong signal that he should sit down with Congress' Democratic leaders to discuss new strategy.

Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, one of the resolution's bipartisan co-sponsors, said calling the resolution nonbinding ignores its real power.

"What could be more binding on the president than the view of the elected representatives of the American people?" asked Lantos, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Boehner, who accuses the Democrats of slowly trying to suffocate the military effort in Iraq, challenged them to a direct debate on cutting off funding.

"Let's get away from the shadow boxing, the slow bleed," and have an up-or-down vote on funding, rather than attaching conditions to future spending legislation, he said.

*E-mail Edward Epstein at [eedstein@sfgate.com](mailto:eedstein@sfgate.com)*

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/02/16/BAGT1O67TB10.DTL>

San Francisco Chronicle Sections

© 2007 Hearst Communications Inc. | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Contact](#)